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SUBJECT: EAP/MLS OFFICE DIRECTOR RAPSON'S MEETINGS WITH GVN
OFFICIALS

REF: (A) HANOI 367 (B) HANOI 349 (C) HANOI 442

11. (SBU) Summary: EAP/MLS Office Director Rob Rapson and the DCM met with GVN officials March 8 on the eve of the departure of Deputy Prime Minister/Foreign Minister Pham Gia Khiem and his delegation to the United States. His exchanges covered recent arrests of dissidents in Vietnam and details of the DPM's schedule in Washington and other cities. DPM Khiem intends to answer Secretary Rice's letter to him in the coming days, and will be bringing with him a letter from Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung to President Bush. PM Dung's letter will deal primarily with Vietnam's hope for U.S. support in the development of its education system. DPM Khiem and his large delegation are primed to discuss trade issues, including the U.S. apparel monitoring mechanism, the recently-proposed Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA) and U.S. export control policies; and, law enforcement cooperation. The MFA noted that DPM Khiem will suggest to Secretary Rice that the U.S. and Vietnam intensify discussions on multilateral, regional and global issues in advance of Vietnam's expected membership on the UNSC beginning in 12008. End Summary.

12. (SBU) On March 8, EAP/MLS Office Director Rob Rapson, accompanied by the DCM, met with GVN officials to discuss Deputy Prime Minister/Foreign Minister (DPM/FM) Pham Gia Khiem's upcoming visit to the United States as well as a broad range of bilateral issues. He first met with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' (MFA) Americas Department Director General Mr. Pham Van Que and later with Office of the Government (OOG) International Relations Deputy Director Bui Huy Hung.

13. (SBU) DG Que reported that the DPM is pleased with the broad range of meetings already confirmed in Washington, and that arrangements for his San Francisco, Los Angeles and Chicago stops are well in train. While the schedule is very tight, the DPM/FM has a large number of issues to discuss with USG counterparts to prepare for President Triet's visit later this year, build upon recent progress and resolve several outstanding bilateral issues (Ref A). Rapson agreed that USG is looking forward to exploring ways to deepen our relationship.

Human Rights

14. (SBU) Rapson added, however, that - given recent developments -- the issue of human rights will loom large in Khiem's discussions in

Washington. Referencing the delay in release of Nguyen Vu Binh, and legal action against Father Nguyen Van Ly and more recently against lawyers Nguyen Van Dai and Le Thi Cong Nhan (septel), many are questioning whether the GVN is initiating a crackdown against dissent.

15. (SBU) DG Que confirmed that the MFA received Secretary Rice's recent letter discussing human rights. There is some "misunderstanding" about the DPM's commitment to Secretary Rice during APEC. Vietnam still intends to release him during the next amnesty, which he opined could be in September. On recent legal action against activists, Que claimed that those activists are increasing their activities to "cause trouble" in advance of the high-profile visits in order to overshadow cooperation in other important areas. Noting Rapson's call for greater freedom of expression, Que begged USG understanding that Vietnam is in a different situation and at a different stage in its development than the United States. Remarking that the United States and Vietnam will hold their Human Rights Dialogue in April, he pressed for further exchanges on this issue, arguing that Vietnam is learning valuable lessons on good governance from the United States and others, but that "we can not become the United States overnight."

Education and Economic Matters

16. (U) The MFA reported that DPM Khiem will bring with him a letter from Prime Minister Dzung to President Bush. DG Que previewed the letter, saying it articulates the GVN's request for USG assistance in the education sector (Ref C). The letter also raises Vietnam's concerns over the Department of Commerce's apparel monitoring mechanism, an issue which the DPM will raise in Washington. Vietnam is worried about the number of jobs that may be lost if U.S. apparel

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importers move their orders elsewhere. MFA Americas Department Officer Le Chi Dzung, also attending the meeting, asked the USG to consider the "humanitarian aspect" of the decision to monitor imports from Vietnam. Lost orders in Vietnam risk the jobs of hundreds of thousands of young Vietnamese workers.

17. (U) Director Rapson queried as to when the GVN would complete its review of the TIFA text proposed by USTR recently, noting that signing of a TIFA would be an excellent way to advance the bilateral economic relationship. Que agreed that Vietnam is interested in a TIFA and would be responding shortly, but also asked the United States to review its export control policies, reduce restrictions on technology transfers to Vietnam and enhance "export credits" through OPIC and the EXIM Bank. He pointed to delays in the issuance of USG approval to export parts of Vietnam's VINASAT-1 satellite purchase from Lockheed Martin as an example of how current policies affect our bilateral trade. Liberalized regulations on technology transfers could contribute to lowering the U.S. trade deficit with Vietnam, he said. The late 2006 Presidential decision to allow the transfer of non-lethal military goods and services is a positive step, but Vietnam would like to pursue further reductions in U.S. export controls, Que said.

18. (U) Both sides agreed to continue open dialogue and close cooperation in the coming days to ensure a successful visit to the United States and to strengthen the rapidly expanding relationship. Rapson pointed to the breadth of DPM Khiem's meetings in Washington as a sign of the high level of ongoing activity between our countries. Looking ahead, Que proposed developing a regular dialogue between the MFA and the Department to discuss bilateral, regional and global issues. Given Vietnam's candidacy as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council, such a forum would be useful, Rapson said. Rapson and the DCM ended the meeting by returning to the human rights issues, underscoring our concern once again over recent events.

OOG: Khiem's Visit Agenda

19. (SBU) In Director Rapson's separate meeting at the Office of the Government, International Relations Deputy Director Hung outlined

the wide range of issues on the DPM's agenda and the March visit's role in setting the stage for President Triet's visit later this year. Hung confirmed that Prime Minister Dzong plans to convey a letter to President Bush through DPM Khiem. He then provided a run-down of Khiem's visit objectives, from Vietnam's side:

-- (1) Follow up on President Bush's and Secretary Rice's visit in November, particularly regarding commitments raised in the Joint Statement;

-- (2) Promote economic cooperation. Hung said these discussions (including with accompanying delegation members on the margins of top-level meetings) will include:

--The signing of the Maritime Transport Agreement;

--An exchange confirming Vietnam's intent to convert the Dalat Nuclear Research Reactor to LEU fuel before the end of the year.

--The signing of an MOU between the GVN and Microsoft Corporation for the purchase of licensed software to equip national and provincial government offices across Vietnam. (A more binding document could be signed at the time of President Triet's visit later in the year.)

--Discussion of large U.S. business contracts with Department of Commerce officials.

--Discussions with the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) on the TIFA and the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) program, and Vietnam's implementation of WTO commitments;

-- (3) To discuss the U.S. apparel monitoring mechanism; and,

-- 4) To discuss education cooperation, particularly possible support for more U.S. scholarships for Vietnamese students, more training for Ph.D-level university professors and support for an "international-level" university in Vietnam.

¶10. (SBU) Director Rapson agreed that the large GVN delegation will have good opportunities for exchanges on relevant issues with the

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Departments of State, Defense, Commerce, Energy, Transportation and Justice, as well as the White House and USTR. He noted our interest in discussing law enforcement cooperation and in particular engaging with Vietnam in combating money laundering. The United States would like to see more law enforcement cooperation, he added. Hung confirmed that OOG Vice Chairman Nguyen Xuan Phuc will meet with counterparts in the DEA and DOJ to discuss these issues. He asked for background on the specific topics the DEA and DOJ plan to raise.

OOG: Human Rights Situation Troublesome

¶11. (SBU) Finally, Rapson reiterated that concerns regarding Vietnam's human rights record would be major topics of discussion during the DPM's meetings. "Frankly, [Nguyen Vu] Binh's status is troublesome," he said, also noting the recent arrests of the human rights lawyers and the case of Father Ly. Noting that Ambassador Marine met this same day with prisoner of concern Phan Van Ban (septel), Hung responded that, "We have done something on this," and that the "MFA will work with your side." He added that the GVN aims to take some kind of actions on the Binh case and that perhaps more information would become available soon.

¶12. (U) EAP/MLS Director Rapson has cleared this cable.

MARINE